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at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MUTHAURA (Kenya)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 18: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES (Territories not covered under other agenda items) (continued)

1. The CHAIRMAN said that several delegations had requested him to extend the deadline for the submission of draft proposals under agenda item 18, including amendments to the recommendations of the Special Committee regarding the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. He therefore proposed that the deadline should be extended to 6 p.m.

2. It was so decided.

3. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) said that two separate questions were at issue: the submission of draft resolutions and the submission of amendments. There was no need for any set time-limits for the submission of amendments. As for draft resolutions, he wondered which resolutions had not yet been submitted.

4. The CHAIRMAN said that the draft resolutions concerned were those on Gibraltar, Western Sahara and the programme of scholarships for the inhabitants of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

5. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) regretted that there had been no consultation with his delegation regarding the draft resolution on Western Sahara, which was being circulated to delegations. Morocco was the party most closely affected by the draft resolution and, according to a long-standing tradition, when a Member State was affected by a particular issue it was at least consulted. His delegation had read the draft resolution which was being circulated and intended to submit amendments to it, for which, as he had indicated earlier, no time-limit was needed.

6. The question of Western Sahara was dealt with primarily by the Security Council, not the General Assembly. As the Committee knew, the referendum in Western Sahara was to take place in 1996. His delegation therefore hoped that, in accordance with Article 12 of the Charter of the United Nations, the General Assembly would not adopt a resolution on the matter during the current year. At the same time, the General Assembly was a sovereign organ and had the right to adopt any resolution it wished, if it saw fit. In that connection, his delegation requested other delegations not to become sponsors of the draft resolution but to attempt to persuade the main sponsor to undertake wider consultations with a view to working out a consensus text.

7. Mr. LAMAMRA (Algeria) said that at the Committee's 5th meeting his delegation had raised a series of legal questions. The Legal Counsel had said that a full reply to those questions required an examination of the documents. He wished to know when and in what form that reply would be forthcoming. Depending on the Legal Counsel's reply, his delegation intended, for its part, to try to persuade the General Assembly to adopt a decision on requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice.

8. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) said that the practice of the United Nations was that there was always a main sponsor who initiated a draft resolution, whereas other sponsors joined later. From the legal standpoint, the sponsors all had equal status when the draft resolution was submitted, but politically speaking there was always a distinction between them. As for the wish that had been expressed for the Legal Counsel's opinion, he pointed out that his delegation had made an official request at the 4th meeting that all delegations should hear that opinion before a decision was taken. The decision had been taken and his delegation considered the matter closed. If the Legal Counsel's opinion was to be heard again, the views of all delegations should also be heard. As for an appeal to the International Court of Justice, that was the sovereign right of all States, but in that regard, too, the opinions of all delegations should be heard.

9. The CHAIRMAN said that the Legal Counsel's opinion would be published as an official document of the Committee.

AGENDA ITEM 87: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (A/50/21, A/50/462)

10. Mr. ZEGHIB (Algeria) (Rapporteur of the Committee on Information), introducing the report of the Committee on Information (A/50/21), said that the Committee had held its seventeenth session from 1 to 12 May 1995. The Committee had had before it reports from the Secretary-General on the allocation of resources from the regular budget of the United Nations to United Nations information centres in 1994 (A/AC.198/1995/2) and on the publications of the Department of Public Information (A/AC.198/1995/3). The Committee had decided by consensus to recommend that the General Assembly should adopt the two draft resolutions and the draft decision contained in chapter IV of its report.

11. Mr. SANBAR (Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information) said that, over the previous year, Permanent Representatives and members of their delegations had played a significantly larger role in promoting a positive image among the media for the work of the United Nations, particularly through international conferences such as the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

12. Introducing the Secretary-General's report on questions relating to information (A/50/462), he said that the report not only gave an overview of the work of the Department of Public Information in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 49/38 B of 9 December 1994, but also showed how the Organization's public information activities had adapted to varying and increasing information demands. That was particularly important at a time when the production and transmission of information had become the world's leading growth industry. An information-driven revolution was reshaping economies and transforming political landscapes in every corner of the world. The "global village" that communications theorists had foreseen 30 years earlier was taking shape. Cultures long isolated from the outside world were being drawn into the general flow of information.

13. At the same time, corrosive ingredients of social disintegration such as migration, drugs, disease, pollution, organized crime, terrorism and civil war

could be witnessed in virtually every region of the world. That was why the voice of the United Nations must be heard more clearly than ever before. The world had to be told why the United Nations was a vital forum for solving problems, how it aided the weak and fed the starving, combated war and disease, championed human rights and fundamental freedoms and promoted the principles of justice and international law. With the Organization gripped by a financial crisis of unprecedented proportions, however, many delegations had expressed concern that the efforts of the United Nations to bring its message to all corners of the world could be severely hampered at the very time when such efforts ought to be redoubled. As the Secretary-General had recently observed, without the support of public opinion the effectiveness of the United Nations would diminish and its very legitimacy would fade.

14. There had always been a great deal of public interest in the work of the United Nations, although the Organization now had to convey its message in a fiercely competitive communications environment. It must find ways to sharpen the focus on current issues and reach the widest possible audience.

15. The Department of Public Information (DPI) had taken specific initiatives on reform two years before the start of the current financial crisis. The purpose had not been merely to save money. While the United Nations was not a profit-making organization, its activities should be cost-effective. The target had therefore been effective programme delivery, the financial savings being a bonus. The application of innovative communications technology had significantly strengthened the information programmes of the United Nations. That was reflected in the proposed DPI budget for 1996 to 1997, in which it was proposed to reduce expenditure by 3.2 per cent compared with the level set in the budget approved for the 1994-1995 biennium. The negative-growth spending would be achieved by making additional cuts, and that despite the fact that the Department had been required to absorb the additional staff of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and units that had formerly been part of the Office of Conference Services. Otherwise, the real reductions in the proposed DPI budget would have been even greater.

16. The sub-zero-growth budget proposal had been achieved by making savings in three key areas. First, the Department was seeking ways of better utilizing advanced information technology for its public information programmes. Second, it had strengthened cooperation with other members of the United Nations system. Third, a series of far-reaching management initiatives had been introduced with the result that the Department's structure was already more streamlined and better integrated. The initiatives had four fundamental objectives: better management of mandated public information programmes, including clear identification of priorities and more precise criteria for measuring and analysing the Department's work; greater utilization of information technology; better planning; and more effective use of financial resources.

17. He hoped that the emergence of a public information culture would create a deeper understanding of the media as allies who needed information to fulfil their tasks. Quiet diplomacy and attempts at peaceful conflict resolution had perhaps led inadvertently to excessive prudence in dealing with the media. However, given the decisive role of communication in decision-making and the involvement of the United Nations in every aspect of human life, the public

information culture must be recognized as a crucial factor in gaining support for the Organization. It was vital to highlight the successes of the United Nations more consistently.

18. A major element of the overall public information strategy was to establish strong partnerships with the media. For example, the partnership recently established with Time Warner Cable of Manhattan had made it possible for information about the United Nations to reach a wider audience in the New York area. The "UN Facts" and "UN Minute" programmes were broadcast on cable television. Cable system air time worth more than half a million dollars had been donated so far in 1995, at no cost to DPI. The Department was also encouraging broadcasters to produce programmes on the United Nations, using unique archive footage on the Organization's history and work. Whenever possible, the Department would transmit its video programmes by satellite, that being the most far-reaching, technologically advanced and least expensive mode. In 1995, the Secretary-General's United Nations Day message had been broadcast by satellite for the first time, with a potential audience of more than 400 million households world wide at a fraction of the cost in previous years.

19. For the past eight years, the television news magazine "UN in Action" had been produced weekly and distributed to some 100 countries. The programme was also broadcast on CNN "World Report", which was watched by tens of millions of people around the world. A survey conducted in 1995 on the effectiveness of DPI programmes had shown that in most cases "UN in Action" was aired at prime time and enjoyed a good response from viewers. In addition, "UN in Action" was particularly valuable in that it showed the impact of United Nations activities on individuals (for example, the refugee returning to his home, or the child receiving his school textbooks), emphasizing the human dimension of United Nations programmes rather than dry, factual information or statistics. Finally, the survey had shown that "UN in Action" was viewed in more countries than had been thought. A number of viewers had suggested that the frequency and length of the programme should be increased.

20. The Department had also reshaped its radio operations. It now provided round-the-clock telephone access to audio information in three languages with twice-daily updates. During the Fourth World Conference on Women, the system had carried more than four hours of audio materials sent directly from Beijing each day. The news magazine "World in Review" was now available via short wave, satellite and cable transmissions all over Europe. By the end of 1995, it would also be available in Africa and Asia through special arrangements with the London-based organization World Radio Network.

21. Radio could be called "a newspaper without frontiers". It had proved to be the most effective information component of peace-keeping missions in Cambodia, Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Angola. Radio remained the dominant medium in much of the world, and was becoming increasingly influential in North America. Currently, United Nations Radio reached millions of listeners through taped programmes delivered in 15 languages to 180 countries and territories. Taped programme distribution, however, had its limitations and uncertainties. He sought the Committee's endorsement of the coordinated efforts initiated earlier in the year by the management of the Department of Public Information, with assistance from the Department of Peace-keeping Operations, the Department

of Political Affairs and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, to develop a central radio broadcasting capacity in support of peace-keeping operations and humanitarian missions, as well as of the general public information needs of the United Nations common system. That effort would entail initiating the necessary expert studies and the pooling of Secretariat-wide resources.

22. The United Nations continued to be challenged by complex peace-keeping and humanitarian missions with diverse mandates. One of the most important factors for the success of those missions was a coordinated and unified public information strategy aimed at increasing public understanding of the role of the United Nations. In that context, the Department of Public Information had sought to increase its involvement, beginning in the earliest stages of mission planning, and to form a partnership with other Secretariat departments concerned with peace-keeping and political and humanitarian affairs. On the Department's initiative, an interdepartmental working group, made up of representatives of the departments concerned, had been established to coordinate information strategies in the field. The working group was currently completing a set of guidelines for establishing information components of field missions, including the creation of a roster of qualified personnel from both within and outside the United Nations system.

23. Some 80 per cent of the Organization's activities were conducted in the economic and social fields. Most media attention, however, was concentrated on only two or three peace-keeping operations. In view of that phenomenon, the Department's strategy should be aimed at focusing greater attention on longer-term efforts to promote development, social justice and democratization. One of the elements of that strategy was to combine resources and experience with other organizations and units of the United Nations system and to ensure that the crucial role of information was recognized.

24. An important aspect of the Department's work was to provide for the informational needs of the major United Nations conferences from the earliest stages of their preparation. An analysis of media coverage of the World Summit for Social Development, which the Department had undertaken jointly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, had revealed that, in all regions of the world, the press had devoted an enormous amount of attention to the development work of the United Nations. Through its network of information centres, the Department had collected nearly 7,000 articles about the Summit. More than one third of the regional newspaper coverage reflected editorial opinion and front-page stories. The study affirmed that the development-oriented work of the Organization could also make headlines. In that connection, the question of creating a United Nations system-wide development publication, as called for by the Committee on Information, was being reviewed. The Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC), at its latest session in July, had considered various options and called for a more detailed study for consideration at one of the sessions of JUNIC in 1996. Work on the study had begun, and it should be available for distribution to members of JUNIC at its next regular session as requested. In addition, preparations for the holding of a seminar in Sana'a on the promotion of independent and pluralistic Arab media were progressing. Issues to be discussed at the seminar included the training of media professionals, women in the media and the strengthening of professional media organizations.

25. One of the important measures for ensuring cooperation between the Department and the community of non-governmental organizations was the annual Conference of the Department and non-governmental organizations. The theme of the Conference in 1995 had been "The United Nations at the turn of the century: global issues, global actors, global responsibility". The Conference had been attended by many non-governmental organizations from various countries, senior officials of the United Nations and other international organizations and religious, university and municipal leaders. Another important tool for shaping public opinion at grass-roots level was the guided tours conducted by the Department, which since their inception in 1952 had been taken by more than 34 million visitors from all over the world. He was pleased to report that thanks to an agreement between the Department and the Office of Conference and Support Services, tour participants were again permitted to stop near the Security Council and Trusteeship Council chambers. In the current fiftieth anniversary year, there had been a marked upsurge in demand for other services rendered by the Department to the public.

26. Turning to electronic information, or what had become known as the "information highway", he noted that despite the great significance of that area of activity for the work of the Department, the spending of considerable sums should not be guided solely by the desire to keep pace with the latest achievements of technology. The Department of Public Information could not afford either to be in the vanguard of technical progress or to lag behind it. The current year had seen a significant increase in demand for information from the Department provided through the Internet electronic network. However, that momentum needed to be maintained and access to information uses employing electronic media expanded by increasing the frequency and broadening the variety of information provided. To that end, resources needed to be allocated to renewing equipment and training personnel.

27. The Department was endeavouring to ensure that information products met the highest broadcasting standards. One of the first steps to the archival system of the future was the introduction of a system for electronic storage, reproduction and dissemination of photographs on compact discs. The introduction of digital technology was marked by the use of digital video recorders and digital audio equipment. At the same time, the Department had to work with both modern and conventional methods, since available resources permitted only a gradual introduction of the new technologies. Serious efforts had been made to adapt and use all the advanced communications technologies, particularly the use of computers for desktop publishing systems, graphic design and cartography. However, the main form of production remained, as before, printed materials, since only a small part of the world's population could afford to use the achievements of the new technologies.

28. In the past year, the Blue Books series had become firmly established as the authoritative consolidated source of material on United Nations operations and themes. The decision to distribute the books in that series only through sales enabled the Department to maximize its resources. Also useful from the standpoint of increasing the Organization's revenue was sale of a great number of the Department's information products. In that regard, the Department would seek to change the present financial rules to permit the use of sales revenues directly for funding development and start-up costs for publications and the

establishment of databases on compact discs. The existence in the Department of the Sales and Marketing Section would permit better coordination of efforts to publish, disseminate, promote and sell publications.

29. Following a review of its publications policy, the Department had come to the following conclusions: through the introduction of high quality standards, a greater number of books would be distributed through sales; publications that even partially duplicated others or did not address a clearly defined audience would be eliminated; in order to increase the Department's outreach, substantially more efforts would be made in the field of electronic publications; to ensure consistency and identity of content and form, it was important for the Department to provide support and advice to other departments regarding their publications programmes. Those steps could be largely realized through the coordination mechanism of the Publications Board.

30. As a result of resource cuts in recent years, the global network of information centres had become a more cost-effective operation. At the same time, those offices, individually and collectively, had scored a number of significant achievements. Taking into account resource limitations and striving to rationalize their activities, the centres had concentrated on establishing joint mechanisms with other United Nations system entities in the field. Operationally, nearly half of the information centres were combined with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) field offices. Agreement had been reached between the Department and the Government of Germany regarding a gradual approach to the opening of an information office in Bonn. In August 1995 an office in Warsaw had been inaugurated. Many requests from Governments for new information operations were constantly being received, and the Department would try to do everything possible in the light of the difficult resource situation.

31. Many staff of the Department were working daily in highly dangerous situations. One staff member at the Information Centre in Algiers had been assassinated in March 1995. Other staff of the Department faced similar dangers as they went about their work of explaining the aims and activities of the United Nations to as broad an audience as possible. Because of the nature of their work, the staff of the Department were more in the public eye than other staff of the Organization. Every effort was being made to mobilize, motivate and lead them to carry out their responsibilities in serving the interests of the Organization and its Member States.

32. Currently, almost 45 per cent of the Professional staff of the Department were women, well above the General Assembly's target for 1995. The proportion of posts in the Department at the senior level (D-1 and above) occupied by women was 28.5 per cent, which was also above the General Assembly's target for 1995. Since 1 January 1994, two thirds of all promotions within the Department had been women. More than 50 per cent of the recruits to the Department over the same period had been women. Although the Department claimed that much progress had been achieved over the past year, much more would have to be done in the year ahead, and for that he counted on the support of delegations.

The meeting was suspended at 11.55 a.m. and resumed at 12.05 p.m.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

33. Mr. MBA ALLO (Gabon) nominated Mr. Breier-Castro (Venezuela) for the post of Rapporteur.

34. Mr. Breier-Castro (Venezuela) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

AGENDA ITEM 87: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/50/21, A/50/462)

35. Mr. GUIBILA (Burkina Faso) said the freedom of the press was central among human freedoms, and accordingly his delegation supported the conclusion and adoption of an international legal instrument on the protection of journalists. At the same time, freedom of the press entailed obligations of responsible conduct and respect for the identity and multiplicity of cultures. Only if those conditions were met could objective and dispassionate, balanced and reliable information be obtained on Member States, and particularly on developing countries, with respect to which a gap was often apparent between the reality and what was said and written about them.

36. In recent years, the effectiveness and usefulness of the United Nations information centres had been unparalleled, as was confirmed by the Secretary-General's report A/AC.198/1995/2 of 22 March 1995. In that connection, his delegation was sceptical about the idea of combining United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices. Between 1991 and 1994 the United Nations Information Centre in Ouagadougou had been managed by UNDP and had been practically unnoticeable and ineffective. Precisely for that reason, the Government had requested the Department of Public Information to appoint a director for the Centre who would work on a full-time basis. That had made it possible to step up the activity of the centre and raise its prestige to a level commensurate with its mandate. Burkina Faso requested the Department of Public Information to increase the material support for the United Nations Information Centre in Ouagadougou in order to enable it to continue the important work it had been able to undertake in such a short time.

37. The integration referred to in some General Assembly resolutions was not a prerequisite for projecting a unified view of the United Nations at the country level. In the opinion of his delegation, about 50 per cent of the Department's financial resources should be used at the local level to expand the work of the 60 existing United Nations information centres and produce interesting information adapted to the conditions of each region with the assistance of national specialists. At the same time, there was an urgent need to achieve a more balanced distribution of available resources among the United Nations information centres in developed and developing countries. It was desirable for each country with such a centre to provide accommodation free of charge or defray the rental costs.

38. His delegation supported the organization of workshops for the staff of the United Nations information centres to enable them to carry out their work effectively and provide national officers with an opportunity to develop their international careers. It supported the reclassification of the posts of the directors of United Nations information centres and the elimination of

differences in levels, particularly since the work of the United Nations Information Centre in Uganda covered Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger.

39. His delegation supported the request for the establishment of full-fledged United Nations information centres in Conakry and Libreville and in Bulgaria, Haiti and Slovakia and intended to introduce amendments to the draft resolution on the subject to take those views into account.

40. Mr. DIAZ (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union, and also Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, said that the European Union had closely followed the work of the Committee on Information and was confident that the Committee would be in a position to fully endorse the outcome of the most recent meeting of the Committee on Information, held from 1 to 12 May 1995. The European Union would actively contribute to further enlarging and building upon the existing consensus in order to enable the Committee to work with the Department of Public Information to ensure that the United Nations information effort was run in an efficient, coordinated and cost-effective manner. The European Union fully supported the Department's efforts to build partnerships with the media and encouraged the objective of increasing public awareness of United Nations issues. However, it would be very useful for the Secretariat to provide more detailed information on the results of the Department's work.

41. With regard to the new technologies of electronic communication, the European Union fully supported the Department's goal of exploiting the enormous outreach and exchange of information that electronic communication offered. The Department should keep pace with developments in modern technology so as to disseminate information to major United Nations target groups. The European Union welcomed the Dag Hammarskjöld Library's technological innovation efforts and its automation strategy. It looked forward to receiving an update on the progress and implementation of those measures, and on further efforts to increase efficiency in that part of the United Nations operations.

42. In the publishing area, the European Union attached particular importance to reference works such as the Yearbook of the United Nations or the new Blue Books series. With regard to a system-wide publication on development issues, the Joint United Nations Information Committee should look further into the feasibility of such a publication at its ad hoc session in early 1996.

43. Another issue of great importance to the European Union was the information effort in support of United Nations peace-keeping operations. The success of such operations depended to a large degree on the understanding and support of the local population, and of the population in the troop-contributing countries. The European Union welcomed the establishment of an interdepartmental Working Group on Media Strategies for Peace-keeping and other Field Operations and the establishment of a central United Nations broadcasting facility.

44. Mr. NIETO (Argentina) said that the work of the Department of Public Information at the recent special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, and also its work in preparing for the international conferences held recently by the United Nations and their follow-up, demonstrated the Department's commitment to the

ideals laid down in the Charter and reflected in the goals set by the Committee on Information. Although the so-called "failures" of the United Nations received broader coverage in the media than its successes, it should be noted that some press organs disseminated serious and objective information about the work of the United Nations.

45. Argentina attached great importance to the initiative of the Assistant Secretary-General in establishing an interdepartmental Working Group on Media Strategies for Peace-keeping and other Field Operations, as described in paragraph 35 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/50/462).

46. It appeared that the process of integrating United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices was continuing and was not encountering obstacles. His delegation felt that the main goal of such activity should be to ensure the smooth conduct of work in the area of public information, making use of specialists. On the other hand, the opinion of the receiving country was extremely important; an overall or global approach to the matter was inappropriate. The commendable work carried out by the Department included the activities of the Media Division which was continuing to issue press releases and provide support for accredited journalists and also journalists covering the work of specific meetings. The dissemination of information was enhanced by the briefings for media representatives organized by the Office of the spokesman for the Secretary-General, the dissemination of press conference materials, the work of United Nations radio and television and also innovations in information technology.

47. Mr. DUMITRIU (Romania) said that the work of the United Nations in the field of information should follow a reforming course, as in the case of all other United Nations activities. The reforms should be carried out on the basis of a multidimensional approach embracing, inter alia, managerial, technological and ethical components. The responsibilities of the Department of Public Information were more complex than ever. However, to meet the requirements placed on it, the Department should not expect increased resources. Instead, it should identify strategic priorities, set realistic goals and implement a performance evaluation system. That implied clearer lines of responsibility and greater accountability. The human resources that were committed should be more efficient, and the resources spent should produce concrete results. On the question of the introduction of new technologies in the area of communications, he welcomed the development of the Integrated Management System aimed at modernizing and enhancing internal flows and the use of information in priority areas. He hoped that if the system was made operational world wide by 1988, that would justify the resources expended and increase efficiency.

48. It was encouraging that the Department of Public Information had overcome a certain technological backwardness and was using modern methods for the dissemination of information. While increasing use was being made of electronic networks, the results of the efforts would be unsatisfactory if the networks could be used only by a restricted group. The United Nations must find innovative ways to facilitate the access of as many countries as possible to its electronic domain.

49. Freedom of information was a fundamental freedom and was indispensable for the promotion of democracy and human rights. The United Nations was called upon to act as a moral authority in protecting the freedom of information, the freedom of the press, and the freedom of journalists. The information disseminated through United Nations channels was of paramount importance in influencing public opinion world wide.

50. A series of world conferences had been organized in recent years. The Department had used new methods for coverage of the conferences and for their preparation. The public awareness campaigns conducted by the Department were highly commendable. The Department had rightly targeted communities and non-governmental organizations at the grass-roots level, educational and cultural institutions and intergovernmental and parliamentary bodies. However, it should not be felt that the Department's work had ended with the completion of the conferences. The time had come for the Department, together with other United Nations bodies and Member States, to cover the follow-up of the conferences.

51. Romania favoured a better-designed role for the Department as a coordinating mechanism for public information on peace-keeping. It shared the view that United Nations information activities should help provide a better understanding of peace-keeping and peacemaking.

52. His delegation had always supported the integration of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices. However, that process did not always go as smoothly as expected. In that connection, it might be useful for the Department to collect independent views from United Nations information centres and UNDP offices in the cities where the integration process was taking place and from the respective Governments.

53. Mr. THAPA (Nepal) said that the message of peace, justice, democracy, human rights, freedom of speech and development should be disseminated as widely as possible. His delegation considered that the transformation of the Department of Public Information would enhance its effectiveness in terms both of management and of cost-efficiency. However, pursuit of those goals should not be at the expense of the overall goal of the Department, which was to forge a robust public information system.

54. Nepal welcomed the outstanding role of the Department in publicizing the series of global conferences held in the past two years. It considered the various publications of the Department such as Development Update, Development Business, the UN Chronicle and the Yearbook of the United Nations immensely useful. In that connection, it wished to reiterate its views on the need for early resumption of the publication Development Forum, in view of the important service it provided on economic and social issues, particularly in relation to developing countries. The Department also deserved praise for having recently launched the publication of the Blue Books series, which contained valuable material for researchers interested in a serious evaluation of United Nations activities. The publication of the daily Journal and press releases continued to be of great relevance and use.

55. As the main communications arm of the United Nations, the Department should help foster greater understanding of the objectives of peace-keeping and peacemaking activities, correcting misperceptions and countering hostile propaganda. As a troop-contributing country of long standing, Nepal considered that timely, well-ordered and integrated information programmes and activities by the Department could be of profound significance for the success of peace-keeping operations, because they helped form a positive climate of world opinion both in the troop-contributing countries and in the countries where the missions were deployed. His delegation therefore urged the Department to allocate more resources for that purpose.

56. The newly formed democratic Government of Nepal was well aware that freedom of expression and unhindered flow of information were fundamental to the growth of democratic values. It therefore wished to reiterate its appeal to the United Nations and the international community to assist countries like Nepal in building the necessary communications infrastructure.

57. Mr. DAGOH (Togo) said that the reports submitted to the Committee demonstrated the determination of the Secretariat to make information one of the central activities of the United Nations. That was proved by the dynamic measures it had taken to project a stronger image of the United Nations through the information centres. His delegation welcomed the work of the Secretariat in ensuring wider knowledge and support of the important international conferences held under United Nations auspices during the current year.

58. It was gratifying to note that in its efforts to better inform international opinion about the implementation of the Organization's goals the Secretariat gave special attention to the needs of those who were interested in those activities. His delegation welcomed the continued production by the Secretariat of thematic and reference publications on the work of the Organization. It considered that the efforts to reform and restructure the Department of Public Information should be supported and contained. For that purpose, financial resources in keeping with the scope of the missions assigned to the Department and the results expected must be mobilized. In producing the various publications, the Department should continue to ensure that all publications were issued at the same time in all of the Organization's official languages. It should also be emphasized that the process of integrating the information centres with the UNDP field offices should be carried out, where necessary, only on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host country and the need to guarantee the independence and efficient operation of the centres.

59. Questions relating to information did not stop at the dissemination of information about the Organization, but also touched upon cooperation in that area between countries of the North and the South. Above and beyond their traditional functions, information and communications had become vital products which played an active part in international trade. Their strategic importance implied that only the developed countries possessing the necessary know-how were striving to protect the market so as to support their own economies, while the primary objective of the developing countries at present was to make information a tool of education, training and nation-building in order to promote development. Those diverging, even opposing views regarding the ultimate

purpose of information and communications meant that developing countries lacking the means to participate in the highly competitive communications market which was dominated by the rich would remain the preferred targets for information, and in that area too would be subject to the law of survival of the fittest.

60. For at least the past four decades, the developing countries had been demanding the creation of a new information and communications order. None the less, the inequalities between the developed and developing countries in those areas continued to be flagrant, since the desired cooperation had not yet attained its objectives. At a time when the United Nations was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, it was not unreasonable to recall that the Organization had a duty to promote a more just and equitable information and communications order by establishing healthy cooperation between Member States.

61. More consistent efforts on the part of the international community were needed to ensure the transfer of appropriate technologies. It was time to understand that to allow the third world countries to remain on the fringes of the rapid changes in telecommunications technology no longer served the interests of peace, security and sustainable development. A new information and communications order also demanded that the information products that were disseminated, particularly in the developing countries, should be based on reality, objectivity and impartiality and should promote political stability, social unity and progress rather than fuel destabilization in all its aspects.

62. Mrs. MILLER (Jamaica) said that a number of the criticisms directed at the United Nations were largely the result of insufficient documentation and dissemination of information outlining the successes of the Organization. Too often, the United Nations was perceived as only a peace-keeping organization, without due regard being given to its wide range of social and economic programmes. A format must be elaborated for disseminating information about the United Nations that would attract the attention not only of academics and diplomats, but of young people as well. As a result of the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the United Nations, public interest in the Organization was at an all time high, and public information had therefore assumed significantly greater importance. Innovative programmes should be developed in collaboration with non-governmental, regional and national organizations, television and radio stations and private sector organizations.

63. Her delegation welcomed the arrival of up-to-date information processing technology at the United Nations and especially the introduction of on-line and CD-ROM databases. Those technological advances would undoubtedly enable the Department of Public Information to set up an international network with real-time capabilities to transmit information relating to United Nations activities. Her delegation commended the Department of Public Information for expanding its information activities through the information centres. In that regard, the work of the Caribbean Regional Centre which served 13 member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was commendable. The work of the Caribbean Radio Unit also deserved praise. Accordingly, the regional centres should be allocated greater human and financial resources in order to satisfy the demand for information about the United Nations.

64. With regard to the question of integrating the information centres with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) field offices, Jamaica recognized the importance of coordinating the work of the various agencies of the United Nations. In that regard, UNDP offices should be adequately equipped to disseminate information about the United Nations. That would be particularly useful in regions such as the Caribbean, where most UNDP offices served several countries far distant from the United Nations Information Centre.

The meeting rose at 1:15 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FIFTIETH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL AND
DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE
(FOURTH COMMITTEE)
10th meeting
held on
Friday, 27 October 1995
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 10th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. SAMADI (Islamic Republic of Iran)
(Vice-Chairman)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 87: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/50/21, A/50/462)

1. Mr. SALLAM (Yemen) said that in view of the major role of information in international affairs at the current time, there was a need to draw up a comprehensive United Nations public information strategy, particularly with regard to such aspects as peace, democracy and development. That strategy should be based on the principles of trustworthiness, objectivity and consideration of the different priorities of individual countries and peoples. It should be kept in mind that the exchange of information among peoples ensured their cultural interaction and served as a means for maintaining peace and strengthening trust. The mass media played an important role in devising that strategy, and the Department of Public Information (DPI) should continue to coordinate relations between the Organization and national and international mass media.

2. His country attached importance to freedom of the press as a basis of democracy. The decision to hold an international seminar on questions relating to information under the auspices of the United Nations and UNESCO in Sana'a at the beginning of January 1996 reflected that fact. The opening in Yemen of a United Nations information centre, which would play a coordinating role in reporting on the problems dealt with by the Organization in the national mass media, was yet a further important development in that field. His Government would support in every possible way the activities of the centre, inter alia, by providing the necessary materials for reporting on the life of the Yemeni people in conditions of development, peace and democracy.

3. Mr. AL-HASSAN (Oman) said that lately the United Nations was frequently being subjected to unjustified criticism, which, to a large extent, was due to an insufficient understanding of the Organization's role in the contemporary world and insufficient awareness of its successes, particularly in the maintenance of international peace and security. The Department of Public Information (DPI), which should help correct misconceptions about the Organization's activities, must play a special role in that regard. Objective criticism should be constructively analysed and measures should be taken to remedy shortcomings. It was also necessary to strengthen coordination between the Committee on Information and the Department, which would make it possible to enhance significantly the effectiveness of the Organization's activities in the field of public information. The Committee on Information, which must protect the interests of the world community as a whole and ensure that narrow bureaucratic approaches did not predominate in that area, had a particular role to play in that connection.

4. Certain groups, motivated by selfish interests, were seeking to denigrate the United Nations before international public opinion. DPI must make the necessary efforts to inform public opinion and refute the fabrications designed to discredit the Organization.

5. Making use of the experience gained during the successful information campaign against apartheid in South Africa, the Department should now focus its efforts on other negative aspects of life in the world community, such as international terrorism, narcotic drugs and various forms of intolerance. The Organization's activities in the field of public information must be continuously adapted to the changing conditions of contemporary life.

6. Mr. VALDES (Cuba) said that at the current time, during the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, there was a unique opportunity to promote the taking of specific measures to eliminate the lack of equality in the world in terms of the dissemination of information, which had a negative impact, in particular, on the situation in developing countries. Cuba was one of the third world countries which was experiencing the effects of such inequality. It continued to be the target of attacks carried out by radio and television, which his delegation had repeatedly drawn attention to in the Committee. The United States of America, continuing to ignore the views of specialized agencies and the readiness of Cuba to establish a serious exchange of information on the basis of the principle of sovereign equality of States and mutual respect, had not halted its illegal television and radio broadcasts directed against Cuba, openly violating the most basic norms of coexistence and international law. The United States allocated more than $11 million annually for the aggressive television campaign against Cuba alone. The international frequency registration committee had criticized that anti-Cuban broadcasting. That position was expressed by many international forums, including that of the non-aligned countries. Cuba once again condemned that aggressive practice, which was in violation of international legal norms and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, and reaffirmed its readiness to continue work to eliminate the existing imbalances in the dissemination of information.

7. Mr. ALVAREZ GOYOAGA (Uruguay) said that the importance of the special relationship that had always existed between the Organization and the information media, had increased in connection with the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that at the current stage, which was characterized by a lack of financial resources, one could not make unnecessary expenditures or cut off the financing of information programmes, which had demonstrated in practice their useful role. With regard to the activities of the Department of Public Information, recognition should be given to the very high level of the "UN Minute" video segments covering the Organization's history and also increased Internet access to the Dag Hammarskjöld Library database. His delegation supported the policy of integrating the information centres provided that preliminary consultations were conducted with both the Governments of receiving countries and the corresponding agencies and departments, particularly UNDP and DPI.

8. His country also agreed with the views expressed in the Committee on Information on the inadvisability of limiting access by visitors to the General Assembly Hall and the Security Council Chamber, even during official meetings, except in cases where confidential questions were being considered. That would help carry out the task of disseminating information about the Organization's most important activities.

9. Uruguay had always felt that the rules and guiding principles for strategies on providing information on peace-keeping operations should be laid down in specific documents and, therefore, supported the recommendations contained in annex III to the report of the Committee on Information (A/50/21).

10. Mr. MAXIMOV (Bulgaria) expressed support for the statement made by the delegate of Spain on behalf of the European Union at the Committee's previous meeting and said that Bulgaria shared wholeheartedly the desire of Member States to reform and modernize the Organization. In that regard, the public information policies and activities of the United Nations were of paramount importance in enhancing the role of that global body, strengthening its authority and gaining universal support for its work worldwide. The experience of the last 50 years demonstrated that the international community expected the Organization to take practical measures and seek solutions to various global, regional and even domestic problems and it was particularly important to disseminate information on its work to that end. The broadcasting and free exchange of accurate and objective information were indispensable conditions for building trust and understanding among peoples and maintaining international peace and security.

11. At the national level, Bulgaria had created the conditions necessary for the diversification of its mass media. Thanks to free enterprise, a number of popular daily and weekly newspapers enjoyed mass circulation and dozens of private radio stations and some independent television companies were now in operation. Those developments were the practical outcome of the Bulgarian Government's efforts to enhance the implementation of the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental human rights and freedoms relating to the obtaining and disseminating of information and the freedom of opinion and expression.

12. He wished to highlight the positive role played by the United Nations information structures in promoting the processes of democratization in the newly emerging independent States, as well as in countries with economies in transition. An example of the work of the Department of Public Information in that area was its annual training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and countries in transition. Bulgaria noted with satisfaction the strengthening of the partnership between DPI and other Secretariat departments and bodies of the United Nations system undertaken with a view to designing and implementing a comprehensive, coordinated and unified United Nations public information strategy. That integrated approach enabled the Department to respond adequately to the growing interest of the international community in the Organization's peace-keeping, sustainable development and human rights work and its other major activities. The Department's work in connection with the celebration of the United Nations fiftieth anniversary and the special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly deserved special praise.

13. It seemed appropriate to address the question of cooperation between DPI and the Committee on Information. That cooperation had become particularly fruitful since the ideological differences in the Committee had been overcome and a constructive and cooperative atmosphere established. The Committee continued to apply an innovative conceptual approach to its various tasks in the field of information, and the Bulgarian delegation wished to reiterate its

support for the dynamic way in which the Department's work was being managed. Bulgaria believed that the Department should play a more active role in interdepartmental consultations and coordination in such priority areas as preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace-keeping and post-conflict peace-building. The Department's new structures and working methods should be examined and tested in practice with a view to redeploying its staff to high priority information tasks and projects. Given that radio was one of the most cost-effective media available to the Department and an important instrument for United Nations development and peace-keeping activities, the Bulgarian delegation believed that the Department should be allocated the necessary resources for its work in that area.

14. With regard to the United Nations information centres, the grave financial problems of the Organization, particularly the limited resources allocated to DPI, made it imperative to examine the Secretary-General's proposal to integrate the centres with other United Nations field offices where appropriate, provided that there was support from the respective host Governments. Of particular interest to Bulgaria was the establishment within the United Nations Development Programme office in Sofia of an information component which would utilize national expertise and joint financing, reducing to a minimum the operational costs borne by the Organization.

15. Mr. MENKES (Russian Federation) said that half a century after the inception of the United Nations, new and very grave problems were emerging which could be solved only through vigorous and effectively coordinated action by all peace-loving forces. Democratic Russia was participating actively in the discussion of the role and place of the media in society and in the search for optimal solutions to that problem. The President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, speaking on 1 September 1995 in Moscow at a forum of the democratic press, had called for the drafting and implementation of a State information policy and proposed that a council should be created to advise the President on information policy. In Russia, the print and electronic media were becoming a powerful, independent force, reflecting the country's entire political spectrum and representing, overall, an important factor in the process of democratic reforms. The character of the parliamentary and presidential election campaigns would depend to a large extent on the position adopted by the media.

16. The discussions during the seventeenth session of the Committee on Information and its results had shown once again that the community of nations was still faced with many unresolved tasks regarding both the conceptual understanding of information problems, including the development of international contacts in that area, and the specific areas for DPI activities. The Russian delegation shared the view that the Department had carried out with great professionalism the large amount of important work entailed by the celebration of the United Nations fiftieth anniversary.

17. With regard to the new world information order, the Russian Federation sympathized with the concerns of the non-aligned States in the field of information and believed that the solution to the problem lay not in confrontation but in the development of international cooperation. The Russian delegation agreed with delegations of other States that it was essential to

further expand information activities in the context of the United Nations peacemaking operations. There was a need to broaden the role of the Department of Public Information in preparing the information components operations of that type.

18. His delegation drew attention to the small number of publications issued by the United Nations in the Russian language and expressed concern at the fact that the situation was similar with regard to the use of Russian in other areas of United Nations information activities. The Russian language continued to be the basic source of information not only for citizens of the Russian Federation, but also for tens of millions of ethnic Russians in several other countries, primarily those of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

19. Countries with economies in transition had specific interests in the information sector, and his delegation considered that the Department of Public Information had a role to play in making United Nations organizations and agencies aware of those interests. His delegation, along with those of Belarus and Ukraine, had proposed the inclusion in the text of draft resolution B of a new version of the previous year's operative paragraph pertaining to information activities for the tenth anniversary in 1996 of the Chernobyl disaster. Through the joint efforts of those three delegations and the staff of the Department, a working plan of scheduled events had been prepared. Everything possible should be done so that the subject of that disaster which had affected the entire planet continued to receive attention from the international community.

20. Mr. HAMDAN (Lebanon) said that his delegation was most satisfied with the activities undertaken by the Department of Public Information. It expressed gratitude to the staff of the United Nations Information Centre in Beirut which had remained open throughout the war for their devoted efforts. Two libraries had been designated United Nations depository libraries in Lebanon in 1995 and would be an important source of information for the Lebanese public. The delegation of Lebanon welcomed the convening of a seminar for the Arab region in Sana'a from 6-11 January 1996. Furthermore, it fully supported the efforts of the Department in the development of a central broadcasting capacity in support of peace-keeping operations and humanitarian missions.

21. In proportion to the size of its population and its territory, Lebanon surpassed all Arab countries in the number of newspapers published. By 1994, in addition to 60 periodicals, about 30 daily newspapers were estimated to be in circulation. Approximately 50 television channels transmitted over Lebanese territory, 18 of them for the Beirut area alone. Radio broadcasting was also flourishing in Lebanon; about 100 stations were transmitting programmes on different wavelengths, and some of them covered the world. The rapid and unregulated expansion of the media sector during the war had compelled the Parliament of Lebanon to adopt a new law on information which called for the reorganization of the media and guaranteed freedom of speech and respect for democratic norms and the rights of citizens by regulating all matters related to the technical and legal aspects of information.

22. Within the framework of its 10-year reconstruction programme, the Government had allocated more than $160 million for the purpose of rehabilitating its telecommunications infrastructure and meeting its electricity

needs. The Lebanese media had an important role to play in the country's reconstruction, and provided support to and promoted understanding of the task Lebanon faced in rehabilitating its institutions and speeding up its political and economic development.

23. Mr. YOOGALINGAM (Malaysia) said that developing countries as a whole suffered from a lack of sufficient information and communications infrastructures. The situation was further compounded by uneven reporting by the media, which were controlled by Western countries. Freedom of information was not the privilege of a chosen few to be used by them to corrupt the culture and moral values of the vast majority. In that regard, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia had proposed putting in place a code of conduct that would regulate the flow of information. The United Nations should be in the forefront of cooperation in issues pertaining to cyberspace in order to ensure the full involvement of the international community. The information superhighway and the world of electronic and satellite communication should continue to help build bridges of understanding between the peoples of the world. His delegation believed that all countries, rich and poor, should have equal access to the free flow of world information.

24. Malaysia noted with appreciation the efforts of the Assistant Secretary-General to establish an interdepartmental working group on media strategies for peace-keeping and other field operations and welcomed the efforts of the Department of Public Information to project an image of unity for the United Nations by expanding communication with the United Nations regional commissions and working with its specialized agencies through the Joint United Nations Information Committee. His delegation also expressed appreciation to the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund for promoting the idea of an inter-linked continuum of major events in the field of economic and social development.

25. Mr. TEE Bee Lock (Singapore) said that continuous technological innovation was facilitating ever wider and faster dissemination of information. The speed and ease with which information crossed national boundaries was redefining basic concepts like sovereignty. As a result, attitudes to economic development were changing. One key issue that needed greater study was the concept of responsibility, which had thus far been somewhat neglected. Since information had real consequences, attention should be focused on the kind and quality of information that was disseminated. More information did not necessarily mean better information. It was not a matter of introducing restrictions. However, freedom of information did not imply complete freedom of action. It was not an absolute right. Like all freedoms, it had to be balanced with certain responsibilities. To set an absolute standard was not only impractical, but harmful.

26. The greater technological ease with which information was now disseminated should bring with it a more stringent standard of objectivity and accuracy and the means for correcting errors and preventing the dissemination of harmful information. That was not a new idea. In 1952, the General Assembly had opened for signature an international treaty called the Convention on the International Right of Correction. Its purpose was to combat the dissemination of false and distorted reports likely to injure friendly relations between States. That

Convention was an example of the fact that freedom of information had never been internationally recognized as an unqualified or absolute right, regardless of the national practice of certain Member States. Technological developments, the greater ease with which information was disseminated and its ever increasing significance might make it appropriate to take another look at the basic ideas contained in that Convention. The Committee on Information might consider how that Convention could be updated to take into account technological developments.

27. In conclusion, he commended the Department of Public Information for promoting greater awareness of the United Nations and its activities. However, much remained to be accomplished, especially in examining means of ensuring more responsible dissemination of information. In particular, the Department might want to look at ways to handle irresponsible criticisms of the United Nations more effectively.

28. Mr. MATESIC (Croatia) said that the free flow of information was necessary not only for facilitating economic development but also for constructive interaction and communication among States and peoples. It was therefore an important instrument in the promotion of international peace and security. Accurate and objective information was also necessary in order to counter any dissemination of negative propaganda which could create misunderstanding and undermine friendly relations among States.

29. Since the dissolution of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the dismantling of the information centre in Belgrade, the Republic of Croatia had not been covered by a United Nations information centre. As the posts of the former information centre in Belgrade had not been abolished, his delegation believed that careful consideration should be given to reserving at least one of those posts for the Republic of Croatia as one of the successor States of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. That could best be accomplished by having the post assigned to the United Nations Information Service in Vienna.

30. Noting that the term "former Yugoslavia" was often used in United Nations publications, as though it were the official name of the State, he said it should be emphasized that the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had been dissolved four years ago and that Croatia, as well as some other successor States, had been Members of the United Nations for more than three years. His delegation considered that the names of those States should be employed and not the term "former Yugoslavia". Furthermore, his delegation had noted that in various DPI press releases, the "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" was listed as a party to various international treaties. It should be remembered that the "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" could not be considered a Member State of the United Nations and that its claim to automatic succession to various international treaties had not been accepted by the international community. That should be reflected in the Department's press releases, and his delegation appealed to the Department to be more vigilant in that regard.

31. The activities of the Department of Public Information could greatly benefit peace-keeping operations. Accurate information could contribute

positively to the process of confidence-building and help create the conditions for lasting peace.

32. Mr. KOZIY (Ukraine) said that his delegation had examined the Secretary-General's report (A/50/462) attentively and attached great value to the work of the Department of Public Information and its efforts to disseminate information on the activities of the Organization in dealing with the urgent problems facing the international community. In its view, the Department's cohesive approach to its tasks ensured the effectiveness of its work while at the same time economizing resources, which was especially important for the Organization at the current juncture.

33. At a time when the United Nations was being criticized in certain quarters, the Department of Public Information was its best defender, providing full and accurate information on the work of the United Nations and disseminating it throughout the world. Its large arsenal of means for the transmission of information was a powerful instrument for influencing wide sectors of the population. His delegation also took note of the effectiveness with which DPI, together with Member States, and many non-governmental organizations and private individuals, were making use of the new technologies and electronic means for the dissemination of information. Those means made it possible to receive, process and send information to broad publics efficiently. His delegation noted the successful work of the United Nations Information Centre at Kiev, which made extensive use of "INTERNET" to disseminate information on its work and the activities of the United Nations. The Centre issued quarterly bulletins in English and Ukrainian as well as press releases and periodicals.

34. Twenty-six April 1996 would mark the tenth anniversary of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station which had brought the world to the brink of a global environmental disaster. His delegation had already dealt in detail with that question in the Fourth Committee in connection with agenda item 82, entitled "Effects of atomic radiation". It wished only to note that in spite of the critical shortage of energy resources, the President of Ukraine had taken the political decision to shut down the Chernobyl nuclear energy plant by the year 2000. The Chernobyl accident had not become a matter of history and, in that connection, his delegation considered it necessary for the international community to give it the closest attention. He noted that the Department of Public Information had appointed a coordinator for the activities to be carried out in connection with the anniversary of the accident and a series of activities had been planned which would be carried out at United Nations Headquarters. It should be noted that these activities would have no appreciable financial implications for the Organization as the exhibits and all necessary materials would be provided by the countries organizing these activities.

35. His delegation wished to draw attention to the statement by the Assistant Secretary-General expressing grief at the death of a colleague in one country's information centre and in that connection he recalled his country's proposal concerning the need to draw up a legal document for the protection of journalists reporting from places or regions of social or military tension.

36. Mr. ZAKARIA (Indonesia) said that one way of redressing the disparity of information between developed and developing countries was the building of infrastructures. Equally important was the need to disseminate unbiased information. His delegation welcomed the spirit of cooperation and consensus evident during the past few years. By emphasizing the critical importance of equitable participation by all Member States in the emerging new world information and communication order, the imbalances and disparities in communication capabilities could be removed and an era of the democratization of global information and communication processes ushered in.

37. His delegation was heartened by the strengthening of cooperation within the United Nations system, particularly between the Department of Public Information and the International Programme for Development and Communications of UNESCO. It appreciated the tangible progress made by the Programme in helping third world countries to develop communications infrastructures. For their part, the non-aligned countries had worked towards strengthening cooperation with UNESCO and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and between those bodies and the non-aligned news agencies pool and broadcasting organizations. Those endeavours had enhanced media capabilities and fostered the development of infrastructures in numerous scientific, technological, economic, social and cultural activities.

38. His delegation wished to emphasize the important role of the media in mobilizing world public opinion. They should therefore engage in professional and factual reporting on matters of common concern with a view to providing objective information and thus promoting greater understanding among nations and their peoples. He noted with appreciation the effective implementation of the Department of Public Information's mandate and the Department's efforts to update United Nations informational and interactional capabilities, particularly through the INTERNET and other electronic networks.

39. The integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) should be pursued on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the countries concerned and at the same time ensuring the effective functioning of those centres.

40. Mr. MBA-ALLO (Gabon) said that awareness of the vital role of information and of its importance to international development was nothing new. A new fact should now be added to that awareness, however, since not only were injustices in that area not being overcome, there was even an increasing tendency throughout the world for international events to be depicted in a one-sided way, made possible by advances in information technology which, to date, had not been adequately mastered by Africa in particular and by the developing countries in general. People living in most areas of the world, and particularly in Africa, were still confined to media ghettos only because they lacked any significant scientific capacity or other means of obtaining the necessary modern technology. Instead of becoming actors in the ongoing historical processes of the world, they were relegated to the role of mere pawns in another "history", shaped by the conjuring forces of certain other countries which held the keys to the realm of modern science.

41. The time had come to restore the missing link, and thus to ensure that the global village was not merely a fanciful goal, but a reality benefiting all countries and all regions. In that connection, Gabon reaffirmed its commitment to the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and international cooperation in general. In addition, Gabon actively advocated South-South cooperation in the area of information and communications. Such cooperation exemplified by the work of the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries and of the Coordinating Committee of the Non-Aligned News Agencies Pool, fostered the establishment of a new international order in the area of information and communications sensitive to the aspirations and common interests of the developing countries.

42. The publication Africa Recovery continued to exert considerable influence on African and international mass media, as well as on managers, teachers, research workers and non-governmental organizations. His delegation also commended the Department on its work in promoting and covering the major international conferences held under the auspices of the United Nations during 1995, as well as the Special Commemorative Meeting on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations.

43. It should be noted, however, that the shortage - and even total lack - of financial resources remained a weak link. Over a period of about 15 years, the Department's budget had undergone zero growth. In many respects, its trend even appeared to be in inverse proportion to the growth of its mandate. For that reason, it was essential to mobilize sufficient financial resources, commensurate with the tasks assigned to the Department.

44. Gabon drew attention again to the request to the United Nations to open an information centre in Libreville. That request was contained in paragraph 17 of draft resolution B. While in some countries the United Nations information centres were considered a luxury, in developing countries they often served as the sole source of information on international politics and on the Organization itself, and they also provided good research libraries.

45. Mr. AL-OTAIBI (Kuwait) said that his delegation appealed to all delegations to pay their arrears to the United Nations, to ensure that the Organization, including DPI, would be able to perform its functions. It was not logical for States to expect the Department to widen the scope of its work, without at the same time meeting their own obligations to the United Nations.

46. Associating himself with the statements made by representatives of other developing countries, he urged DPI and UNESCO to step up their efforts to strengthen the information infrastructure in the developing countries. Particular importance attached to the establishment of a new international order in the area of information and communications, capable of ensuring the unimpeded flow of information. He hoped that the Department would continue to coordinate its work with other bodies dealing with information issues. In that connection, he stressed the importance of cooperation with the Committee on Information.

47. One of the primary functions of DPI was to publicize achievements in the political, economic and social areas of which the Organization was justifiably

proud. The liberation of Kuwait, in which the United Nations had played a leading role by expelling Iraq from Kuwaiti territory, ending the Iraqi occupation and restoring the Kuwait-Iraq frontier, set a standard to be followed in upholding the purposes and principles of the United Nations. His country hoped that the Department would issue a publication describing that historic and unprecedented accomplishment.

AGENDA ITEM 18: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES (Territories not covered under other agenda items) (continued)

48. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) noted that, at the previous meeting, the deadline for the submission of draft proposals under agenda item 18 had been extended to 6 p.m. of the same day. At the very last minute, one delegation had submitted a draft resolution on Western Sahara. His delegation was grateful to all those delegations which had heeded its appeal and had not sponsored the draft. Preparation of the draft had been shrouded in complete silence and Morocco - one of the main parties concerned - had not been consulted. That was contradictory to democratic principles designed to ensure consensus. He emphasized that the draft resolution submitted to the Secretariat should be disseminated precisely as it had been submitted, with the name of only one sponsor. If additional sponsors appeared subsequently, an appropriate announcement could be made by the Chairman or a revised text could be issued listing their names.

49. Mr. SAI (Algeria) said that the draft resolution had been submitted in full compliance with the rules. There could be no question of its withdrawal.

50. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) said, by way of clarification, that he was not talking of the withdrawal of the draft, but merely stating that, when it was issued, it should indicate only that delegation which had submitted it, since, at the time of its submission, there had been no other sponsors.

51. Mr. SAI (Algeria) said that there could be no question of removing the names of the other sponsors. The list of sponsors should remain as it was. Since the issue was the responsibility of another member of the Algerian delegation, he reserved the right to revert to it at the next meeting.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.